A

DIALOGUE

BETWEEN

A MAN of LETTERS

AND

Mr. J. J. ROUSSEAU,

ON THE

SUBJECT of ROMANCES.

Publiſhed ſince his ELOISA,

And intended as a PREFACE to that WORK.

Tranſlated from the FRENCH.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Dialogue was originally intended as a Preface to ELOISA; *but its form and length permitting me to prefix to that Work only a few extracts from it, I now publish it entire, in hopes that it will be found to contain some useful hints concerning Romances in general. Besides, I thought it proper to wait till the Book had taken its chance, before I discussed its inconveniences and advantages, being unwilling either to injure the Bookseller, or supplicate the indulgence of the Public.*

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A MAN of LETTERS

AND

Mr. J. J. ROUSSEAU.

N. THERE, take your Manuſcript: I have read it quite through.

R. Quite through? I underſtand you: you think there are not many readers will follow your example.

N. Vel duo, vel nemo.

R. Turpe & miſerabile. But let me have your ſincere opinion.

N. I dare not.

R. You have dared to the utmoſt by that ſingle word: Pray explain yourſelf.

N. My opinion depends upon your anſwer to this queſtion: is it a real, or fictitious, correſpondence?

R. I cannot perceive the conſequence. In order to give one's ſentiments of a book, of what importance can it be to know how it was written?

N. In this caſe it is of great importance. A portrait has its merit if it reſembles the original, be that original ever ſo ſtrange; but in a picture which is the produce of imagination, every human figure ſhould reſemble human nature, or the picture is of no value: yet ſuppoſing them both good in their kind, there is this difference, the portrait is intereſting but to a few people, whilſt the picture will pleaſe the public in general.

R. I conceive your meaning. If theſe letters are portraits, they are unintereſting; if they are pictures, they are ill done. Is it not ſo?

N. Preciſely.

R. Thus I ſhall ſnatch your anſwers before you ſpeak. But, as I cannot reply directly

directly to your queſtion, I muſt beg leave to propoſe one in my turn. Suppoſe the worſt: my Eloiſa ——

N. Oh! if ſhe had really exiſted.

R. Well.

N. But certainly it is no more than a fiction.

R. Be it ſo.

N. Why then, there never was any thing more abſurd: the letters are no letters, the romance is no romance, and the perſonages are people of another world.

R. I am ſorry for it, for the ſake of this.

N. Conſole yourſelf; there is no want of fools among us; but yours have no exiſtence in nature.

R. I could —— No, I perceive the drift of your curioſity. But why do you judge ſo precipitately? Can you be ignorant how widely human nature differs from itſelf? how oppoſite its characteriſtics? how pre-

judice and manners vary according to times, places, and age. Who is it that can preſcribe bounds to nature and ſay, Thus far ſhalt thou go, and no farther?

N. If ſuch reaſoning were allowed, monſters, giants, pygmies and chimeras of all kinds might be ſpecifically admitted into nature: every object would be disfigured, and we ſhould have no common model of ourſelves. I repeat it, in a picture of human nature, every figure ſhould reſemble man.

R. I confeſs it; but then we ſhould diſtinguiſh between the variety in human nature and that which is eſſential to it. What would you ſay of one who ſhould only be able to know mankind in the picture of a Frenchman?

N. What would you ſay of one who, without expreſſing features or ſhape, ſhould paint a human figure covered with a veil? ſhould we not have reaſon to aſk, where is the man?

R. Without expreſſing features or ſhape? Is this juſt? There is no perfection in human nature: that is indeed chimerical. A young

young virgin in love with virtue, yet ſwerving from its dictates, but reclaimed by the horror of a greater crime; a too eaſy friend puniſhed at laſt by her own heart for her culpable indulgence; a young man, honeſt and ſenſible, but weak, yet in words a philoſopher; an old gentleman bigotted to his nobility, and ſacrificing every thing to opinion; a generous and brave Engliſhman, paſſionately wiſe, and, without reaſon, always reaſoning.

N. A huſband, hoſpitable and gay, eager to introduce into his family his wife's quondom paramour.

R. I refer you to the inſcription of the plate *.

N. Les belles ames —— Vaſtly fine!

R. O philoſophy! What pains thou takeſt to contract the heart and leſſen human nature!

N. It is fallaciouſly elevated by a romantic imagination. But to the point. The

* See the 7th Plate.—The cuts are daily expected from Paris.

two friends—What do you ſay of them?—and that ſudden converſion at the altar?—divine grace, no doubt.——

R. But Sir.

N. A pious chriſtian, not inſtructing her children in their catechiſm; who dies without praying; whoſe death nevertheleſs edifies the parſon, and converts an Atheiſt—Oh!

R. Sir——

N. As to the reader being intereſted, his concern is univerſal, and therefore next to none. Not one bad action; not one wicked man to make us fear for the good. Events ſo natural, and ſo ſimple, that they ſcarce deſerve the name of events; no ſurprize; no dramatic artifice; every thing happens juſt as it was expected. Is it worth while to regiſter ſuch actions as every man may ſee any day of his life in his own houſe or in that of his neighbour?

R. So that you would have common men, and *un*common events? Now I ſhould rather deſire the contrary. You took it for a romance: it is not a romance: but,

but, as you ſaid before, a collection of letters.

N. Which are no letters at all: this, I think, I ſaid alſo. What an epiſtolary ſtyle! how full of bombaſt! What exclamations! What preparation! How emphatical to expreſs common ideas! What big words and weak reaſoning! Frequently neither ſenſe, accuracy, art, energy, nor depth. Sublime language and groveling thoughts. If your perſonages are in nature, confeſs, at leaſt, that their ſtyle is unnatural.

R. I own that in the light in which you are pleaſed to view them, it muſt appear ſo.

N. Do you ſuppoſe the public will not judge in the ſame manner; and did you not aſk my opinion?

R. I did, and I anſwer you with a deſign to have it more explicitly: now it appears that you would be better pleaſed with letters written on purpoſe to be printed.

N. Perhaps I might; at leaſt I am of opinion that nothing ſhould be printed which is not fit for the preſs.

R. So that in books we ſhould behold mankind only as they chuſe to appear.

N. Moſt certainly, as to the author; thoſe whom he repreſents, ſuch as they are. But in theſe letters this is not the caſe. Not one ſtrong delineation; not a ſingle perſonage ſtrikingly characterized; no ſolid obſervations; no knowlege of the world. What can be learnt in the little ſphere of two or three lovers or friends conſtantly employed in matters only relative to themſelves?

R. We may learn to love human nature, whilſt in extenſive ſociety we learn to hate mankind. Your judgment is ſevere; that of the public ought to be ſtill more ſo. Without complaining of injuſtice, I will tell you, in my turn, in what light theſe letters appear to me; not ſo much to excuſe their defects, as to diſcover their ſource.

The perceptions of perſons in retirement are very different from thoſe of people in the great world; their paſſions being differently modified, are differently expreſt; their imaginations conſtantly impreſt by the ſame objects, are more violently affected.

The

The ſame ſmall number of images conſtantly return, mix with every idea, and create thoſe ſtrange and falſe notions ſo remarkable in people who ſpend their lives in ſolitude; but does it follow that their language is energic? No; 'tis only extraordinary: it is in our converſation with the world that we learn to ſpeak with energy; firſt, becauſe we muſt ſpeak differently and better than others, and then, being every moment obliged to affirm what may not be believed, and to expreſs ſentiments which we do not feel, we endeavour at a perſuaſive manner which ſupplies the place of interior perſuaſion. Do you believe that people of real ſenſibility expreſs themſelves with that vivacity, energy, and ardor which you ſo much admire in our drama and romances? No; true paſſion, full of itſelf, is rather diffuſive than emphatical; it does not even think of perſuaſion, as it never ſuppoſes that its exiſtence can be doubtful. In expreſſing its feelings it ſpeaks rather for the ſake of its own eaſe, than to inform others. Love is painted with more vivacity in large cities, but is it in the village therefore leſs violent?

N. So that the weakneſs of the expreſſion is a proof of the ſtrength of their paſſion.

R. Sometimes, at leaſt, it is an indication of its reality. Read but a love letter written by an author who endeavours to ſhine as a man of wit; if he has any warmth in his brain, his words will ſet fire to the paper; but the flame will ſpread no farther: you may be charmed, and perhaps a little moved, but it will be a fleeting agitation which will leave nothing except the remembrance of words. On the contrary, a letter really dictated by love, written by a lover influenced by a real paſſion, will be tame, diffuſe, prolix, unconnected, and full of repetitions: his heart overflowing with the ſame ſentiment, conſtantly returns to the ſame expreſſions, and like a natural fountain flows continually without being exhauſted. Nothing brilliant, nothing remarkable; one remembers neither words nor phraſes; there is nothing to be admired, nothing ſtriking: yet we are moved without knowing why. Though we are not ſtruck with ſtrength of ſentiment, we are touched with its truth, and our hearts, in ſpite of us, ſympathize with the writer. But men of no ſenſibility, who know nothing more than the flowery jargon of the paſſions, are ignorant of thoſe beauties and deſpiſe them.

N. I am all attention.

R. Very well. I ſay, that in real love letters, the thoughts are common, yet the ſtile is not familiar. Love is nothing more than an illuſion; it creates for itſelf another univerſe; it is ſurrounded with objects which have no exiſtence but in imagination, and its language is always figurative; but its figures are neither juſt nor regular: its eloquence conſiſts in its diſorder, and when it reaſons leaſt it is moſt convincing. Enthuſiaſm is the laſt degree of this paſſion. When it is arrived at its greateſt height, its object appears in a ſtate of perfection; it then becomes its idol; it is placed in the heavens; and as the enthuſiaſm of devotion borrows the language of love, the enthuſiaſm of love alſo borrows the language of devotion. Its ideas preſent nothing but Paradiſe, angels, the virtue of ſaints, and the delights of heaven. In ſuch tranſport, ſurrounded by ſuch images, is it not natural to expect ſublime language? Can it poſſibly debaſe its ideas by vulgar expreſſions? Will it not on the contrary raiſe its ſtyle, and ſpeak with adequate dignity? What then becomes of your *epiſtolary ſtyle?* it would do mighty well, to be ſure, in writing

to the object of one's adoration: in that case they are not letters, but hymns.

N. We shall see what the world will say.

R. No: rather see the winter on my head. There is an age for experience, and another for recollection. Our sensibility may be extinguished by time; but the soul which was once capable of that sensibility remains. But to return to our letters: if you read them as the work of an author who endeavours to please, or piques himself on his writing, they are certainly detestable. But take them for what they are, and judge of them in their kind. Two or three young people, simple, if you will, but sensible, who mutually expressing the real sentiments of their hearts, have no intention to display their wit. They know and love each other too well for self-admiration to have any influence among them. They are children, and therefore think like children. They are not natives of France, how then can they be supposed to write correctly? They lived in solitude, and therefore could know but little of the world. Entirely filled with one single sentiment, they are in a constant delirium, and yet presume to philosophise. Would you have them know how

how to obſerve, to judge, and to reflect? No: of theſe they are ignorant; but they are verſed in the art of love, and all their words and actions are connected with that paſſion. Their ideas are extravagant, but is not the importance which they give to theſe romantic notions more amuſing than all the wit they could have diſplayed. They ſpeak of every thing; they are conſtantly miſtaken; they teach us nothing, except the knowledge of themſelves; but in making themſelves known, they obtain our affection. Their errors are more engaging than the wiſdom of the wiſe. Their honeſt hearts, even in their tranſgreſſions, bear ſtill the prejudice of virtue, always confident and always betrayed. Nothing anſwers their expectations; every event ſerves to undeceive them. They are deaf to the voice of diſcouraging truth: they find nothing correſpond with their own feelings, and therefore, detaching themſelves from the reſt of the univerſe, they create, in their ſeparate ſociety, a little world of their own, which preſents an entire new ſcene.

N. I confeſs, that a young fellow of twenty, and girls of eighteen, though not uninſtructed, ought not to talk like philoſophers,

ſophers, even though they may ſuppoſe themſelves ſuch. I own alſo, for this diſtinction has not eſcaped me, that theſe girls became wives of merit, and the young man a better obſerver. I make no compariſon between the beginning and the end of the work. The detail of domeſtic occurrences may efface, in ſome meaſure, the faults of their younger years: the chaſte and ſenſible wife, the worthy matron, may obliterate the remembrance of former weakneſs. But even this is a ſubject for criticiſm: the concluſion of the work renders the beginning reprehenſible: one would imagine them to be two different books, which ought not to be read by the ſame people. If you intended to exhibit rational perſonages, why would you expoſe them before they were become ſo? Our attention to the leſſons of wiſdom is deſtroyed by the child's-play by which they are preceeded: we are ſcandalized at the bad, before the good can edify us. In ſhort, the reader is offended and throws the book aſide in the very moment when it might become ſerviceable.

R. On the contrary, I am of opinion, that to thoſe who are diſguſted with the beginning, the end would be entirely ſuperfluous; and that the beginning will be agreeable

greeable to thoſe readers to whom the concluſion can be uſeful. So that, thoſe who do not read to the end will have loſt nothing, becauſe it was an improper book for them; and thoſe to whom it may be of ſervice would never have read it, if it had begun with more gravity. Our leſſons can never be uſeful unleſs they are ſo written as to catch the attention of thoſe for whoſe benefit they were calculated.

I may have changed the means, and not the object. When I endeavoured to ſpeak to *men*, I was not heard; perhaps in ſpeaking to children I ſhall gain more attention; and children would have no more reliſh for naked reaſon, than for medicines ill diſguiſed.

Coſi all' egro fanciul porgiamo aſperſi
Di ſoave licor gl'orli del vaſo;
Succhi amari ingannato in tanto ei beve,
E dall' inganno ſuo vita riceve.

N. Here again I am afraid you are deceived: they will ſip on the edge of the veſſel, but will not drink the liquor.

R. Be it ſo; it will not be my fault: I ſhall have done all in my power to make

it

it palatable. My young folks are amiable; but to love them at thirty it is neceſſary to have known them when they were ten years younger. One muſt have lived with them a long time to be pleaſed with their company; and to taſte their virtues, it is neceſſary we ſhould firſt have deplored their failings. Their letters are not intereſting at firſt; but we grow attached by degrees, and can neither continue nor quit them. They are neither elegant, eaſy, rational, ſenſible, nor eloquent; but there is ſenſibility which gradually communicates itſelf to our hearts, and which at laſt is found to ſupply the place of all the reſt. It is a long romance, of which no one part has power to move us, and yet the whole produces a proper effect. At leaſt, ſuch were its effects upon me: pray were not you touched in reading it?

N. No; yet I can eaſily conceive your being affected: if you are the author, nothing can be more natural; and if not, I can ſtill account for it. A man of the world can have no taſte for the extravagant ideas, the affected pathos, and falſe reaſoning of your good folks; but they will ſuit a recluſe, for the reaſon which you have given: now, before you determine to publiſh

liſh the manuſcript, you would do well to remember that the world is not compoſed of hermits. All you can expect is that your young gentleman will be taken for a Celadon, your Lord B. for a Don Quixote, your young damſels for two Aſtreas, and that the world will laugh at them for a company of fools. But a continued folly cannot be entertaining. A man ſhould write like Cervantes before he can expect to engage his reader to accompany him through ſix volumes of nonſenſe.

R. The very reaſon which would make you ſuppreſs this work, will induce me to print it.

N. What! the certainty of its not being read?

R. A little patience, and you will underſtand me. As to morals, I believe that all kinds of reading are uſeleſs to people of the world: firſt, becauſe the number of new books which they run through, ſo generally contradict each other, that their effect is reciprocally deſtroyed. The few choice books which deſerve a ſecond peruſal, are equally ineffectual: for, if they are written in ſupport of received opinions,

they

they are ſuperfluous; and if in oppoſition, they are of no uſe; they are too weak to break the chain which attaches the reader to the vices of ſociety. A man of the world may poſſibly, for a moment, be led from his wonted path by the dictates of morality; but he will find ſo many obſtacles in the way, that he will ſpeedily return to his former courſe. I am perſuaded there are few people, who have had a tolerable education, that have not made this eſſay, at leaſt once in their lives; but, finding their efforts vain, they are diſcouraged from any future attempt, and conſider the morality of books as the jargon of idleneſs. The farther we retreat from buſineſs, great cities, and numerous ſocieties, the more the obſtacles to morality diminiſh. There is a certain point of diſtance where theſe obſtacles ceaſe to be inſurmountable, and there it is that books may be of uſe. When we live in ſolitude, as we do not then read with a deſign to diſplay our reading, we are leſs anxious to change our books, and beſtow on them more reflection; and as their principles find leſs oppoſition from without, their internal impreſſion is more effectual. In retirement, the want of occupation, obliges thoſe who have no reſource in themſelves, to have recourſe to books of amuſement. Romances

are

are more read in the provincial towns than at Paris, in towns leſs than in the country, and there they make the deepeſt impreſſion: the reaſon is plain.

Now it happens unfortunately that the books which might amuſe, inſtruct, and conſole the people in retirement, who are unhappy only in their own imagination, are generally calculated to make them ſtill more diſſatisfied with their ſituation. People of rank and faſhion are the ſole perſonages of all our romances. The refined taſte of great cities, court maxims, the ſplendour of luxury, and epecurian morality; theſe are their precepts, theſe their leſſon of inſtruction. The colouring of their falſe virtues tarniſhes their real ones. Polite manners are ſubſtituted for real duties, fine ſentiments for good actions, and virtuous ſimplicity is deemed want of breeding.

What effect muſt ſuch repreſentations produce in the mind of a country gentleman, in which his freedom and hoſpitality is turned into ridicule, and the joy which he ſpreads through his neighbourhood is pronounced to be a low and contemptible amuſement? What influence muſt they not have upon his wife, when ſhe is taught, that the care of her family is beneath a lady of

her

her rank; and on his daughter, who being inſtructed in the jargon and affectation of the city, diſdains for his clowniſh behaviour, the honeſt neighbour whom ſhe would otherwiſe have married. With one conſent, aſhamed of their ruſticity, and diſguſted with their village, they leave their antient manſion, which ſoon becomes a ruin, to reſide in the metropolis; where the father, with his croſs of St. Lewis, from a gentleman becomes a ſharper; the mother keeps a gaming houſe; the daughter amuſes herſelf with a circle of gameſters: and frequently all three, after having led a life of infamy, die in miſery and diſhonour.

Authors, men of letters, and philoſophers are conſtantly inſinuating, that in order to fulfil the duties of ſociety, and to ſerve our fellow creatures, it is neceſſary that we ſhould live in great cities: according to them, to fly from Paris, is to hate mankind; people in the country are nobody in their eyes; to hear them talk, one would imagine that where there are no penſions, academies, nor open tables, there is no exiſtence.

All our productions verge to the ſame goal. Tales, romances, comedies, all are levelled

levelled at the country; all conſpire to ridicule ruſtic ſimplicity; they all diſplay and extol the pleaſures of the great world; it is a ſhame not to know them; and not to enjoy them, a misfortune. How many of thoſe ſharpers and proſtitutes, with which Paris is ſo amply provided, were firſt ſeduced by the expectation of theſe imaginary pleaſures? Thus prejudice and opinion contribute to effect the political ſyſtem by attracting the inhabitants of each country to a ſingle point of territory, leaving all the reſt a deſert: thus nations are depopulated, that their capitals may flouriſh; and this frivolous ſplendor with which fools are captivated, makes Europe verge with celerity towards its ruin. The happineſs of mankind requires that we ſhould endeavour to ſtop this torrent of pernicious maxims. The employment of the clergy is to tell us that we muſt be good and wiſe, without concerning themſelves about the ſucceſs of their diſcourſes; but a good citizen, who is really anxious to promote virtue, ſhould not only tell us to be good, but endeavour to make the path agreeable which will lead us to happineſs.

N. Pray, my good friend, take breath for a moment. I am no enemy to uſeful de-

deſigns; and I have been ſo attentive to your reaſoning, that I believe it will be in my power to continue your argument. You are clearly of opinion, that to give to works of imagination the only utility of which they are capable, they muſt have an effect diametrically oppoſite to that which their authors generally propoſe; they muſt combat every human inſtitution, reduce all things to a ſtate of nature, make mankind in love with a life of peace and ſimplicity, deſtroy their prejudices and opinions, inſpire them with a taſte for true pleaſure, keep them diſtant from each other, and inſtead of exciting people to crowd into large cities, perſuade them to ſpread themſelves all over the kingdom, that every part may be equally enlivened. I alſo comprehend, that it is not your intention to create a world of Arcadian ſhepherds, of illuſtrious peaſants labouring on their own acres and philoſophiſing on the works of nature, nor any other romantic beings which exiſt only in books; but to convince mankind that in rural life there are many pleaſures which they know not how to enjoy; that theſe pleaſures are neither ſo inſipid nor ſo groſs as they imagine; that they are ſuſceptible of taſte and delicacy; that a ſenſible man, who ſhould retire with his family into the

country, and become his own farmer, might enjoy more rational felicity, than in the midſt of the amuſements of a great city; that a good houſewife may be a moſt agreeable woman, that ſhe may be as graceful and as charming as any town coquet of them all; in ſhort, that the moſt tender ſentiments of the heart will more effectually animate ſociety, than the artificial language of polite circles, where the ill-natured laugh of ſatyr is the pitiful ſubſtitute of that real mirth which no longer exiſts. Have I not hit the mark?

R. 'Tis the very thing; to which I will add but one reflection. We are told that romances diſturb the brain: I believe it true. In continually diſplaying to the reader the ideal charms of a ſituation very different from his own, he becomes diſſatisfied, and makes an imaginary exchange for that which he is taught to admire. Deſiring to be that which he is not, he ſoon believes himſelf actually metamorphoſed, and ſo becomes a fool. If, on the contrary, romances were only to exhibit the pictures of real objects, of virtues and pleaſures within our reach, they would then make us wiſer and better. Books which are deſigned to be read in ſolitude, ſhould be

be written in the language of retirement: if they are meant to inſtruct, they ſhould make us in love with our ſituation; they ſhould combat and deſtroy the maxims of the great world, by ſhewing them to be falſe and deſpicable, as they really are. Thus, Sir, a romance, if it be well written, or at leaſt if it be uſeful, muſt be hiſſed, damned, and deſpiſed by the polite world, as being a mean, extravagant and ridiculous performance; and thus what is folly in the eyes of the world is real wiſdom.

N. Your concluſion is ſelf-evident. It is impoſſible better to anticipate your fall, nor to be better prepared to fall with dignity. There remains but one difficulty. People in the country, you know, take their cue from us. A book calculated for them muſt firſt paſs the cenſure of the town: if we think fit to damn it, its circulation is entirely ſtopt. What do you ſay to that?

R. The anſwer is quite ſimple. You ſpeak of *wits* who reſide in the country; whilſt I would be underſtood to mean real country folks. You gentlemen who ſhine in the capital, have certain prepoſſeſſions of which you muſt be cured: you imagine that

that you govern the taſte of all France, when in fact three fourths of the kingdom do not know that you exiſt. The books which are damned at Paris often make the fortune of country bookſellers.

N. But why will you enrich them at the expence of ours?

R. Banter me as you pleaſe, I ſhall perſiſt. Thoſe who aſpire to fame muſt calculate their works for the meridian of Paris; but thoſe who write with a view to do good, muſt write for the country. How many worthy people are there who paſs their lives in cultivating a few paternal acres, far diſtant from the metropolis, and who think themſelves exiled by the partiality of fortune? During the long winter evenings, deprived of ſociety, they paſs the time in reading ſuch books of amuſement as happen to fall into their hands. In their ruſtic ſimplicity they do not pride themſelves on their wit or learning; they read for entertainment rather than inſtruction; books of morality and philoſophy are entirely unknown to them. As to your romances, they are ſo far from being adapted to their ſituation, that they ſerve only to

render it insupportable. Their retreat is represented to be a desert, so that whilst they afford a few hours amusement, they prepare for them whole months of regret and discontent. Why may I not suppose that, by some fortunate accident, this book, like many others of still less merit, will fall into the hands of those inhabitants of the fields, and that the pleasing picture of a life exactly resembling theirs will render it more tolerable? I have great pleasure in the idea of a married couple reading this novel together, imbibing fresh courage to support their common labours, and perhaps new designs to render them useful. How can they possibly contemplate the representation of a happy family without attempting to imitate the pleasing model? How can they be affected with the charms of conjugal union, even where love is wanting, without increasing and confirming their own attachment? In quitting their book, they will neither be discontented with their situation, nor disgusted at their labour: on the contrary, every object around them will assume a more delightful aspect, their duties will seem ennobled, their taste for the pleasures of nature will revive; her genuine sensations will be rekindled

kindled in their hearts, and perceiving happineſs within their reach, they will learn to taſte it as they ought: they will perform the ſame functions, but with another ſoul; and what they did before as peaſants only, they will now tranſact as real patriarchs.

N. So far, you ſail before the wind. Huſbands, wives, matrons —— but with regard to young girls; d'ye ſay nothing of thoſe?

R. No. A modeſt girl will never read books of love. If ſhe ſhould complain of having been injured by the peruſal of theſe volumes, ſhe is unjuſt: ſhe has loſt no virtue; for ſhe had none to loſe.

N. Prodigious! attend to this, all ye amorous writers; for thus ye are all juſtified.

R. Provided they are juſtified by their own hearts and the object of their writings.

N. And is that the caſe with you?

R. I am too proud to anſwer to that queſtion; but Eloiſa had a certain rule by which ſhe formed her judgment of books *: if you like it, uſe it in judging of this. Authors have endeavoured to make the reading of romances ſerviceable to youth. There never was a more idle project. It is juſt ſetting fire to the houſe in order to employ the engines. Having conceived this ridiculous idea, inſtead of directing the moral of their writings towards its proper object, it is conſtantly addreſſed to young girls †, without conſidering that theſe have no ſhare in the irregularities complained of. In general, though their hearts may be corrupted, their conduct is blameleſs. They obey their mothers in expectation of the time when it will be in their power to imitate them. If the wives do their duty, be aſſured the girls will not be wanting in theirs.

N. Obſervation is againſt you in this point. The whole ſex ſeem to require a time for libertiniſm, either in one ſtate or the other. It is a bad leaven, which muſt

* See Vol. II. p. 74.

† This regards only the modern Engliſh romances.

fer-

ferment ſoon or late. Among a civilized people the girls are eaſy, and the wives difficult, of acceſs; but where mankind are leſs polite, it is juſt the reverſe: the firſt conſider the crime only, and the latter the ſcandal. The principal queſtion is, how to be beſt ſecured from temptation: as to the crime it is of no conſideration.

R. If we were to judge by its conſequences, one would be apt to be of another opinion. But let us be juſt to the women: the cauſe of their irregularities are leſs owing to themſelves, than to our bad inſtitutions. The extream inequality in the different members of the ſame family muſt neceſſarily ſtifle the ſentiments of nature. The vices and misfortunes of children are owing chiefly to the father's unnatural deſpotiſm. A young wife, unſuitably eſpouſed, and a victim to the avarice or vanity of her parents, glories in effacing the ſcandal of her former virtue by her preſent irregularities. If you would remedy this evil, proceed to its ſource. Public manners can only be reformed by beginning with private vices, which naturally ariſe from parents. But our reformers never proceed in this manner. Your cowardly

authors preach only to the oppreſſed; and their morality can have no effect, becauſe they have not the art to addreſs the moſt powerful.

N. You, Sir, however run no riſk of being accuſed of ſervility; but may you not poſſibly be too ſincere? In ſtriking at the root of this evil, may you not be the cauſe of more ——

R. Evil? to whom? In times of epidemical contagion, when all are infected from their infancy, would it be prudent to hinder the diſtribution of ſalutary medicines under a pretence that they might do harm to people in health? You and I, Sir, differ ſo widely on this point, that if it were reaſonable to expect that theſe letters can meet with any ſucceſs, I am perſuaded they will do more good than a better book.

N. Certainly your females are excellent preachers. I am pleaſed to ſee you reconciled with the ladies; for I was really concerned when you impoſed ſilence on the ſex *.

* See the letters to M. d'Alembert *ſur les Spectacles.*

R. You

R. You are too ſevere; I muſt hold my tongue: I am neither ſo wiſe nor ſo fooliſh as to be always in the right. Let us leave this bone for the critics.

N. With all my heart, leſt they ſhould want one. But ſuppoſe you had nothing to fear from any other quarter, how will you excuſe to a certain ſevere cenſor of the ſtage, thoſe warm deſcriptions, and impaſſioned ſentiments, which are ſo frequent in thoſe letters? Shew me a ſcene in any of our theatrical pieces equal to that in the wood at Clarens, or that of the dreſſing room. Read the letter on theatrical amuſements; read the whole collection. In ſhort, be conſiſtent, or renounce your former opinions. What would you have one think?

R. I would have the critics be conſiſtent with themſelves, and not judge till they have thoroughly examined. Let me intreat you to read once more with attention the parts you have mentioned; read again the preface to *Narciſſe*, and you will there find an anſwer to the accuſation of inconſiſtency. Thoſe forward gentlemen who pretend to diſcover that fault in the *Devin du Village*, will undoubtedly think it much

more glaring in this work. They will only act in character; but you ———

N. I recollect two paſſages *. You do not much eſteem your cotemporaries.

R. Sir, I am alſo their cotemporary! O why was I not born in an age in which I ought to have burnt this collection!

N. Extravagant as uſual! however, to a certain degree, your maxims are juſt. For inſtance; if your Eloiſa had been chaſte from the beginning, ſhe would have afforded us leſs inſtruction; for to whom would ſhe have ſerved as a model? In the moſt corrupt ages mankind are fond of the moſt perfect leſſons of morality: theory ſupplies the place of practice, and at the ſmall expence of a little leiſure reading, they ſatisfy the remnant of their taſte for virtue.

R. Sublime authors, relax a little your perfect models, if you expect that we ſhould endeavour to imitate them. To what purpoſe do you vaunt unſpotted pu-

* Preface to *Narciſſe* —— Lettre à M. d'Alembert.

rity?

rity? rather ſhew us that which may be recovered, and perhaps there are ſome who will attend to your inſtructions.

N. Your young hero has already made thoſe reflections; but no matter, you would be thought no leſs culpable in having ſhewn us what *is done*, in order to ſhew what *ought to be done*. Beſides, to inſpire the girls with love, and to make wives reſerved, is overturning the order of things, and recalling thoſe trifling morals which are now totally proſcribed by philoſophy. Say what you will, it is very indecent, nay ſcandalous for a girl to be in love: nothing but a huſband can authoriſe a lover. It was certainly very impolitic to be indulgent to the unmarried ladies, who are not allowed to read you, and ſevere upon the married ones, by whom you are to be judged. Believe me, if you were fearful of ſucceſs, you may be quite eaſy: you have taken ſufficient care to avoid an affront of that nature. Be it as it may, I ſhall not betray your confidence. I hope your imprudence will not carry you too far. If you think you have written a uſeful book, publiſh it; but by all means conceal your name.

R. Con-

R. Conceal my name! Will an honeſt man ſpeak to the public from behind a curtain? Will he dare to print what he does not dare to own? I am the editor of this book, and I ſhall certainly fix my name in the title page.

N. Your name in the title-page!

R. Yes, Sir, in the title-page.

N. You are ſurely in jeſt.

R. I am poſitively in earneſt.

N. What your real name? *Jean Jacques Rouſſeau*, at full length?

R. *Jean Jacques Rouſſeau* at full length.

N. You ſurely don't think. What will the world ſay of you?

R. What they pleaſe. I don't print my name with a deſign to paſs for the author, but to be anſwerable for the book. If it contains any thing bad, let it be imputed to me; if good, I deſire no praiſe. If the work in general deſerves cenſure, there is ſo much

much more reaſon for prefixing my name. I have no ambition to paſs for better than I am.

N. Are you content with that anſwer?

R. Yes, in an age when it is impoſſible for any one to be good.

N. Have you forgot *les belles ames?*

R. By nature *belles*, but corrupted by your inſtitutions.

N. And ſo we ſhall behold, in the title-page of a book of love-epiſtles, by *J. J. Rouſſeau, Citizen of Geneva!*

R. No, not *Citizen of Geneva.* I ſhall not profane the name of my country. I never prefix it, but to thoſe writings by which I think it will not be diſhonoured.

N. Your own name is no diſhonourable one, and you have ſome reputation to loſe. This mean and weak performance will do you no ſervice. I wiſh it was in my power to diſſuade you; but if you are determined to proceed, I approve of your doing it boldly and

and with a good grace. At leaſt this will be in character. But a propos; do you intend to prefix your motto?

R. My bookſeller aſked me the ſame queſtion, and I thought it ſo humorous that I promiſed to give him the credit of it. No, Sir, I ſhall not prefix my motto to this book; nevertheleſs, I am now leſs inclined to relinquiſh it than ever. Remember that I thought of publiſhing thoſe letters at the very time when I wrote againſt the theatres, and that a deſire of excuſing one of my writings, has not made me diſguiſe truth in the other. I have accuſed myſelf before hand, perhaps, with more ſeverity than any other perſon will accuſe me. He who prefers truth to fame, may hope to prefer it to life itſelf. You ſay that we ought to be conſiſtent: I doubt whether that be poſſible to man, but it is not impoſſible to act with invariable truth. This I will endeavour to do.

N. Why then, when I aſk whether you are the author of theſe letters, do you evade the queſtion?

R. I will not lie, even in that caſe.

N. But you refuſe to ſpeak the truth.

R. It is doing honour to truth to keep it ſecret. You would have leſs difficulty with one who made no ſcruple of a lie. Beſides, you know men of taſte are never miſtaken in the pen of an author. How can you aſk a queſtion which it is your buſineſs to reſolve?

N. I have no doubt with regard to ſome of the letters; they are certainly yours: but in others you are quite inviſible, and I much doubt the poſſibility of diſguiſe in this caſe. Nature, who does not fear being known, frequently changes her appearance; but art is often diſcovered, by attempting to be too natural. Theſe epiſtles abound with faults, which the moſt arrant ſcribbler would have avoided. Declamation, repetitions, contradictions, &c. In ſhort, it is impoſſible that a man, who can write better, could ever reſolve to write ſo ill. What man in his ſenſes would have made that fooliſh Lord *B.* advance ſuch a ſhocking propoſal to Eloiſa? Or what author would not have corrected the ridiculous behaviour of his young hero, who

who though positively resolved to die, takes good care to apprize all the world of his intention, and finds himself at last in perfect health? Would not any writer have known that he ought to support his characters with accuracy, and vary his style accordingly, and he would then infallibly have excelled even nature herself?

I have observed that in a very intimate society, both style and characters are extremely similar, and that when two souls are closely united, their thoughts, words, and actions will be nearly the same. This Eloisa, as she is represented, ought to be an absolute inchantress; all who approach her, ought immediately to resemble her; all her friends should speak one language; but these effects are much easier felt than imagined: and even if it were possible to express them, it would be imprudent to attempt it. An author must be governed by the conceptions of the multitude, and therefore all refinement is improper. This is the touch-stone of truth, and in this it is that a judicious eye will discover real nature.

R. Well, and so you conclude.——

N. I do not conclude at all. I am in doubt, and this doubt has tormented me inexpreſſibly, during the whole time I ſpent in reading theſe letters. If it be all a fiction, it is a bad performance; but ſay that theſe two women have really exiſted, and I will read their epiſtles once a year to the end of my life.

R. Strange! what ſignifies it whether they ever exiſted or not? They are no where to be found: they are no more.

N. No more? So they actually did exiſt.

R. The concluſion is conditional: if they ever did exiſt, they are now no more.

N. Between you and I, theſe little ſubtilties are more concluſive than perplexing.

R. They are ſuch as you force me to uſe, that I may neither betray myſelf nor tell an untruth.

N. In ſhort, you may do as you think proper; your Title is ſufficient to betray you.

R. It

R. It diſcovers nothing relative to the matter in queſtion; for who can tell whether I did not find this title in the manuſcript? Who knows whether I have not the ſame doubts which you have? Whether all this myſtery be not a pretext to conceal my own ignorance?

N. But however you are acquainted with the ſcène of action. You have been at Vevai, in the *Pays de Vaud?*

R. Often; and I declare that I never heard either of Baron Etange, or his Daughter. The name of Wolmar is entirely unknown in that country. I have been at Clarens, but never ſaw any houſe like that which is deſcribed in theſe letters. I paſſed through it in my return from Italy, in the very year when the ſad cataſtrophe happened, and I found no body in tears for the death of Eloiſa Wolmar. In ſhort, as much as I can recollect of the country, there are, in theſe letters, ſeveral tranſpoſitions of places, and topographical errors, proceeding either from ignorance in the author, or from a deſign to miſlead the reader. This is all you will learn from me on this point, and you may be aſſured that no one elſe ſhall draw any thing more from me.

N. All

N. All the world will be as curious as I am. If you print this work, tell the public what you have told me. Do more, write this converſation as a Preface: it contains all the information neceſſary for the reader.

R. You are in the right. It will do better than any thing I could ſay of my own accord. Though theſe kind of apologies ſeldom ſucceed.

N. True, where the author ſpares himſelf. But I have taken care to remove that objection here. Only I would adviſe you to tranſpoſe the parts. Pretend that I wanted to perſuade you to publiſh, and that you objected. This will be more modeſt, and will have a better effect.

R. Would that be conſiſtent with the character for which you praiſed me a while ago?

N. It would not. I ſpoke with a deſign to try you. Leave things as they are.

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